DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 098 930 IR 001 306

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TITLE The Role of the School Media Center and the School Media Specialist.
INSTITUTION Groton Public Schools, Conn.
PUB DATE Apr 74
NOTE 4p.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.75 HC-$1.50 PLUS POSTAGE
DESCRIPTORS Educational Innovation; Elementary Secondary Education; *Individualized Instruction; *Instructional Improvement; Instructional Materials Centers; *Library Role; *Media Specialists; *Personnel Needs; School Libraries; Staff Role

ABSTRACT

As schools move from a classroom-dominated program to a learner-oriented program, the media program emerges as an integral part of the school experience. The success of the educational programs depends in large part on the way learners use resources to find, evaluate, and apply information. The media specialist works with teachers and students to plan and carry out a program which makes the best use of all types of media. Individualization of instruction is impossible without an active media program. The elementary schools of Groton, Connecticut are moving rapidly toward this learner-oriented type of program, with the media program taking an important role. Lack of trained media specialists has been a limiting factor, but, since the Groton schools never had separate audiovisual and library programs, many of the coordination problems faced by other schools have been bypassed. The media program has moved beyond the media centers into the entire school and is attempting to play a strong role in curriculum development and the individualization of instruction. This report utilizes many quotes from a study, published by the U.S. Office of Education, which reviews the school library media field. (Author/SL)

ED 098930

MEDIA SERVICES CENTER
GROTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS
GROTON, CONNECTICUT

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April 1974

THE ROLE OF THE SCHOOL MEDIA CENTER AND THE SCHOOL MEDIA SPECIALIST

There appears to be some confusion about the use of the terms "media center" and "media specialist" and the difference between these terms and the "school library" and "librarian." It is the sort of confusion that often exists when something new is introduced, and the concept of the school media program is relatively new in education. Since there are real differences between the traditional library and the newer media programs, it is important for people to understand that the media specialist is far more than a librarian who works with filmstrips and to gain some perspective on the kind of program Groton is offering and the direction in which it should go.

Media programs have become vital in the educational picture due to the great changes in the learning patterns of youngsters, caused largely by their exposure to television and other mass media. As schools move from a classroom and teacher-dominated program to a learner-oriented program, the media program emerges as an integral part of the school experience. Media plays an active not a passive role in the learning process since the success of the educational programs depends in large part on the way learners use resources to find, evaluate, and apply information; the media specialist has become a key member of the educational team not just the waterboy.

The media specialist works with teachers and students to plan and carry out a program which makes the best use of all types of media from the book to the videotape. Individualization of instruction is impossible without an active media program. In the Groton elementary schools, we are moving rapidly toward this learner-oriented type of program, and the media program is essential in the continued development in this direction.

A report, reviewing the school library media field published recently by the U.S. Office of Education based on a study of the education professions in 1971-72 and prepared under the direction of the National Center for the Improvement of Educational Systems,* contains some authoritative data on the subject which is relevant to our discussions here in Groton. Since it is a U.S. government publication, this report can be quoted at length without violating copyright regulations. The rest of this paper is a series of direct quotations from this 58 page document with some comments on the local situation, as it applies to our elementary school program.

"As most students and all teachers know, the traditional school library has played an important role in public education. But for the most part the library has been a passive partner in the educational process, a resource and support for the

* The Education Professions 1971-72, Part IV-A Manpower Survey of the School Library Media Field. U.S.Government Printing Office, 1973. DHEW Publication No. (OE) 73-12001. The study was conducted under contract by Social, Educational Research and Development, Inc., Washington, D.C., an independent outside agency.

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teacher's management of learning. There have been, to be sure, exceptions where outstanding librarians have joined with perceptive teachers and administrators to augment the library's place in the educational process, but for the most part the isolation and nature of the school library has tended to keep it on the periphery of the student's day.

"Proponents of the new 'media centers' see them as having a far different role and function---reaching out through a variety of techniques to intervene directly in the learning process. At its edges this change blends in with the advance of instructional technology throughout the school; the media center promises to become a catalyst for revolutionary changes which technology may bring to education. Given the large scope of this potential, the training of the new media specialist clearly has implications extending far beyond the library and audiovisual professions."

NOTE: In Groton some of our school programs have progressed into this new role. Manpower/womanpower has been the limiting factor in this evolution since obviously an active role requires more time and effort than a passive role.

"The basic conclusion of the study was that very little data are available in schools and training institutions to provide definitive information on the problems in the field and the direction in which it is moving."

"Another major finding of the study is that the field of school library media is in a state of flux. It is composed of two major steams--(1) audiovisual programs, services, and facilities, and (2) school library programs---that traditionally have been strongly independent of each other...The field is moving toward a merger of the two programs...The final step in the historical development of media programs is for this program to become an integral part of the learning process...The staff of the media center then will play a key role in curriculum development, establishment of objectives, and the like. In most areas, this last step is a long way in the future.

NOTE: Since Groton never had separate audiovisual and library programs, we have been able to skip over some of the developmental problems of other school systems and have reached this higher stage of development more rapidly. Our program is now on the verge of reaching this last step of development; all that is needed is understanding of the value of this program and support through staff and materials that are needed for continued progress.

"Elementary and secondary school media programs, school libraries, instructional materials centers---however they may be called---constitute some of the most rapidly changing areas in the educational field."

"The most important characteristic of the services offered in the ideal school library media facility is not only the provision of traditional library services, but the availability of services as an integral part of the learning process of the school. The staff will play a key role in the development of curricular objectives and the selection and development of materials that will meet the objectives of the curriculum. In addition, students will use the center not only for traditional research in terms of selecting materials to read and examine, but the center's equipment will enable students to construct materials, reports, and so on."

NOTE: Groton is beginning to make these services available to students with good results and strong movement toward individualized approaches. The present staff is overextended and more staff positions (as well as more materials) are needed if this program is to develop so that it can reach all students.

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"The basic conclusion is that the school library media field is in an extreme state of flux characterized by: the rapid introduction and utilization of new equipment, facilities, and approaches in schools; a field that is not making maximum use of persons trained in media approaches in schools; and a demand for professionals and nonprofessionals through 1980 that is almost impossible to project or predict in any way."

NOTE: Our staff has acquired the competencies necessary to provide a unified media program and so we have a solid base on which to build a fine program. Now we need to make the media specialists full time in our schools, so that they can continue the program development that has been begun.

"Why the increased interest in better libraries and/or media programs and action toward implementing school library media centers? The major reason is that the schools are changing. Increased emphasis is being placed on such things as individualized instruction, self-directed learning, multimedia approaches, team teaching, the open school, and the like. These new concepts dictate new forms of school organization with decreasing emphasis on teacher-oriented programs and an increasing emphasis on learning-centered programs. As a result, the traditional concept of a school library is becoming obsolescent and is being replaced by a center or program which is linked to the learning process. This is the essential difference between a traditional school library and a media program. Many libraries and media centers are moving in this direction, making it possible for the school library media center to act as an active leader (rather than a passive servant) in the education of students--for it is through multimedia available in a well-equipped school library media center that a student can best individualize learning."

NOTE: If we are truly interested in individualizing learning, then we must give more attention to our school media program as an important and integral part of this process.

"In the school library media center, media of all sorts rather than playing a passive role in the educational process, will play an active role. Materials and curricula will be created by students and teachers alike and the staff in the media center will not only make materials and equipment available on call, but will serve the learning process by selecting, assembling, and creating the media which will best achieve curricular objectives. Furthermore, the program will emanate out of the center to other areas throughout the school, thereby helping to more effectively integrate the learning process.

"The stranger who comes in contact with the new media program will still see the staff circulating materials and equipment as presently, but he will also see the staff participating in learner-oriented programs, in team teaching, in curriculum development, and in evaluation roles."

NOTE: This is happening in our Groton schools and should be encouraged and expanded. The media program has moved beyond the media centers into the entire school (partly because of space limitations). The program is attempting to play an active role in curriculum development; this aspect needs encouragement.

"In this emerging field there is a critical need for carefully controlled experimentation and research. The need for better evaluation remains pressing.

"Despite this need, however, one can compile from the literature a somewhat impressive collection of facts and findings that indicate positive results do occur when well-staffed and well-equipped media centers are operating in schools."

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(The report goes on to summarize a number of studies which show that there are improved achievement scores for children in schools with well developed library media programs as well as changes in the behavior of the children in these schools.)

"The FSEA Preliminary Report (1970) indicated that school media centers have an effect on the style of learning in children."

(This section of the report concludes that media programs also have proven value for students with reading difficuluties, for gifted students, for special education students, for vocational education programs, and for the culturally disadvantaged as shown in various studies.)

NOTE: We have found that our media program is especially necessary in individualizing instruction for these special groups of students as well as for the so-called average child who also needs an individualized program geared to his abilities and interests. We have never made an evaluative study of our media program although it has been urged by the School Media Advisory Committee in the past, but subjective evaluations by principals and other staff members indicate the value of the program.

"The Survey of school library media centers and the visits to a sample of school systems and to exemplary programs enabled a limited evaluation of the overall quality and sophisitication of school media centers. After this survey one of the conclusions was that there is evidence that manpower is the controlling factor that determines whether a school library progresses from a storage-retrieval room to a center that is actively involved in the school's education program."

NOTE: In Groton's elementary school media program, we are fortunate in having media specialists who have the competencies and philosophy required for a strong media program and hence for a strong program of individualized instruction. It would appear to be a most cost-effective way of developing the individualized learning program which is our stated goal.

Prepared by Mrs. Elizabeth T. Fast, Director of Media Services